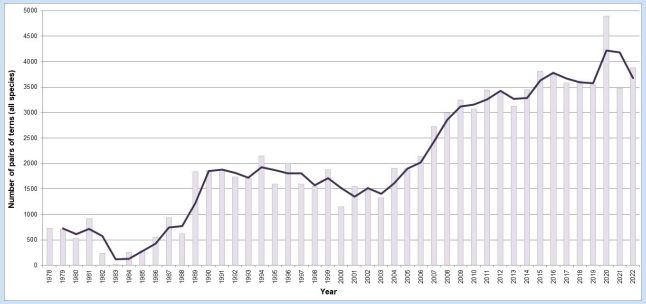
Terns

Terns are a group of small seabirds. Five species regularly breed in Ireland; four of them at Lady's Island Lake. The local birds comprise the largest mixed colony of terns in the country. They are white or pale grey in colour with black caps, coloured bills, and webbed feet.

Above: Common Tern on its nest.
Right: Male Gadwall on Inish.
Photos: Dave Daly.

The approximate numbers of terns that breed each year are: Sandwich Terns (1,700), Arctic Terns (1,000), Common Terns (700) and Roseate Terns (200). The colony is managed by the government's National Parks and Wildlife Service. Wardens are contracted each year when the birds are breeding between mid-April and mid-August. The chart trendline below shows how the number of all four species of breeding terns has grown due to careful management, from a low of just eight pairs in 1983 to over 3500 in recent years.



Further information

The National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), an executive agency of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, is the statutory body responsible for nature conservation and natural heritage in Ireland. The NPWS is responsible for managing biodiversity at Lady's Island Lake. The NPWS website at www.npws.ie gives a description of the area together with maps, aerial photographs and other information. The NPWS contact person for the South Wexford Coast is Tony Murray, Conservation Ranger, telephone 01 539 3212, email Tony.Murray@npws.gov.ie.

Above: Nesting Black-headed Gull.
Photos: Dave Daly.

Wildlife conservation at Lady's Island Lake is featured in the *Wexford County Development Plan* and the *County Wexford Biodiversity Action Plan*, both policy documents of Wexford County Council. Both documents may be accessed at https://www.wexfordcoco.ie/. Via its function as the local planning authority, Wexford County Council is a major player in conserving the area's wildlife resources.

Country Code

Visitors to Lady's Island Lake are very welcome and can help conserve the biodiversity of the area by following the Country Code: Leave the area as you found it. Do nothing to destroy the wonderful amenity you have come to enjoy. Kill nothing but time; take nothing but photographs and memories. Take your rubbish home with you; leave nothing but footprints. Thank you.

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Wildlife at Lady's Island Lake

The bird featured in the image above is a Roseate Tern one of the rarest breeding seabirds found in Europe. Each year, about 200 pairs of these rare terns breed on Inish, the island in Lady's Island Lake with the large Monterey Pine tree growing on it. Note that the bird pictured above has numbered rings fitted to its legs; these allow scientists to identify individuals and to track their movements.

Photo: David Daly.

Introduction

Lady's Island Lake is located on the south coast of County Wexford 4km north-west of Carnsore Point, the south-eastern corner of the island of Ireland. The lake is a natural sedimentary lagoon. It is one of the largest lagoons in Ireland and is the best example of a sedimentary lagoon in the country. Water level fluctuates seasonally so while its size and depth vary, it is regularly about 3.5km long by 1km wide and 1-5m deep approximately. It has an area of about 340ha.

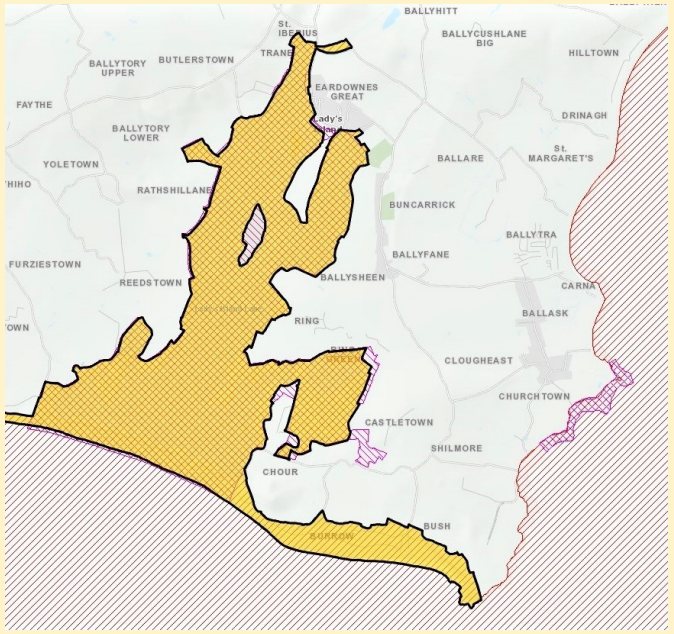
Foxtail Stonewort.
Photo: Jim Hurley.

Lady's Island Lake is of exceptional value for the wildlife it supports. The lagoon sustains such rare underwater plants as Foxtail Stonewort, Beaked Tasselweed and Spiral Tasselweed. In summer, the islands in the lake support the largest mixed colony of nesting terns in Ireland along with the largest colony of Black-headed Gulls found in the southern part of the country. Bearded Reedling regularly breed together with a range of nesting ducks including, on occasion, Shoveler and Garganey. The lake is the top ranked site in Ireland for Gadwall. The last remaining stand of Cottonweed in Ireland and Britain is found on the barrier separating the lagoon from the adjoining Celtic Sea. In winter, the lagoon attracts and supports wintering waterbirds with nationally important numbers of Mute Swan, Wigeon, Gadwall, Little Egret and Black-tailed Godwit.

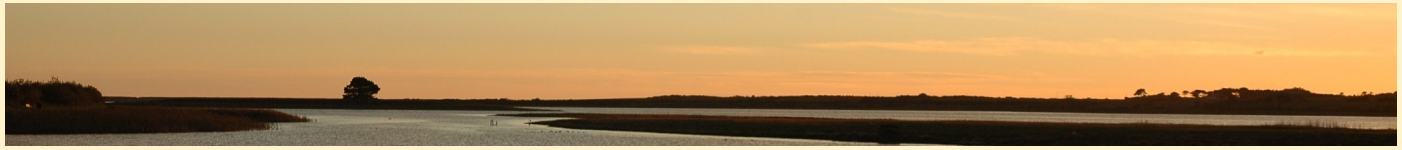
Cottonweed.
Photo: Jim Hurley.

Nature conservation

Lady's Island Lake is of major ecological value for its range of good quality coastal habitats, including two habitats given priority status on Annex I of the European Union Habitats Directive: coastal lagoons and fixed sand dunes. The site is Special Protection Area (SPA) IE0004009 for four species terns, Black-headed Gull, Gadwall and wetland and waterbirds, and Special Area of Conservation (SAC) IE000704 for its lagoon, reefs and barrier habitats.



The map above right shows the extent of the protected areas. Note that the SPA and SAC overlap. The SPA is shown by the downward diagonal lines as at the island of Inish. The SAC is shown by the upward diagonal lines and the mustard colour. Areas where the two designations overlap are shown by the diamond grid pattern. The overlapping protected areas comprise five components: (1) Lady's Island Lake, its islands and adjoining wetlands, (2) the fringing barrier separating the lagoon from the Celtic Sea, (3) the sand dunes at Burrow, (4) the reefs at Carnsore Point and (5) a coastal outlier at Churchtown used as a crèche by breeding terns. The Lady's Island Lake protected area adjoins the Carnsore Point SAC wrapped around the headland.
Sources: left, extract from Ordnance Survey Ireland Discovery Series Sheet 77; and right, screenshot from the National Parks and Wildlife Service website at http://webgis.npws.ie/npwsviewer/ . Ordnance Survey Ireland Permit No 9185 © Ordnance Survey Ireland/Government of Ireland.

Get involved

To contribute to the growing wealth of information about Ireland's biodiversity, you are invited to submit records of any plants or animals you see at Lady's Island Lake to the Waterford-based National Biodiversity Data Centre, Ireland's citizen science portal, at www.biodiversityireland.ie.